

CONSTITUTION GARDENS

Landscape Design Narrative

Phase 1

The proposed overall rehabilitation for Constitution Gardens respects and completes the legacy of the ideas and design intent of its origins – the 1970s design by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) and Dan Kiley which created a sound spatial framework. This project is an opportunity to re-envision the site through contemporary ecological, social, cultural, and political lenses within the modern idiom. The proposed design will create a more accessible, purposeful and flexible place that blends ecological function and socially vibrant spaces.

The Overall Constitution Gardens Project will be constructed in two phases. The Phase 1 Project area is focused on the northeast corner of the site and it will establish a visual presence of the renewed Constitution Gardens of the future. The project area is bounded by Constitution Avenue on the north, 17th Street on the east, the existing north-south path to the WWII memorial to the west, and the existing plaza and levee wall to the south.

Phase 1 work is comprised of both permanent work as well as temporary work. The permanent work includes the relocation and rehabilitation of the Lockkeeper's House, an Arrival Plaza adjacent to the Lockkeeper's House, and the Perimeter Garden Wall. The temporary works are comprised of the arcing path which will lead to the existing plaza space as well as the plantings to the north and south of the arcing path. In the future phase of work, the Pavilion will be installed where the existing Plaza is located and there will be an elevation change which will require that the path and adjacent planting be re-constructed in Phase 2. Care is being taken such that much of the installed plant material will be able to be re-used in Phase 2, as well as the stone. Similarly, benches and light poles that are installed along the Phase 1 arcing path will also be re-used in Phase 2.

Landscape Elements of Phase 1

Perimeter Garden Wall

The Garden Wall is a modern interpretation of the classic dry-stacked stone garden wall. The wall is 17" tall by 36" wide. The wall provides a social edge to the garden and a place for kids to walk along the top of it or to take a moment to rest along the way. Its most important feature is that it provides a sense of gateway and entrance; a sense that when you walk into the garden you have arrived into a quieter setting than the urban and more serious spaces that surround it. In Phase 1, there are three breaks in the Perimeter Garden Wall: the first is at the north stair entrance to the Lockkeeper's House, the others are the two entrances into the Arrival Plaza. The entrances to the arrival plaza are each 19' wide, and allow ample room for visitors to enter. The entrance on 17th street will also act as the Fire Access for Phase 2, so it and the path have been sized to accommodate this use.

The Garden Wall is made up of 5" thick, split face, Saratoga Granite, in variable lengths (24" – 48"). The granite has a color range of warm golden to gray which complements the Lockkeeper House stone colors. The top of the wall is a solid 5" thick slab with a natural cleft top.

Arrival Plaza

The Arrival Plaza is a 3100sqft stone gathering space framed by the Perimeter Garden Walls on the north and east and by a matching 'U' shaped garden wall to the South. A large iconic tree provides shade. The plaza provides space for groups to gather, prior to entering the Lockkeeper's House or settle out into the Gardens. The primary access to the Lockkeeper's House is through the plaza. The 'U' shaped seat wall has a break in the middle of it providing access to the Historic Mounting Block which was found near the Lockkeeper's House.

The Arrival Plaza is made up of 12" wide bands of bright gray Ticonderoga Granite. The pavers have 5 different lengths, ranging from 14.5" to 23.5".

Arcing Path

The Arcing Path takes visitors from the Arrival Plaza up to the Existing Plaza overlooking the Lake. In the future, this path will lead visitors up to the new Pavilion. In order to accommodate both the large visitor population as well as the future fire access to the Pavilion, the Arcing Path is 18' wide. The design of the path and its materiality break down its scale and makes it friendlier to various numbers of pedestrians. The path has a concrete middle section that is 12.5' wide and 2.75' wide stone bands on each side of the path. The stone bands are made up of thin rectangular pavers which run parallel to the path and accentuate its length. The pavers are 4.5" wide and are 5 different lengths, ranging from 4.5" to 13.5". The stone bands match the stone paving of the Arrival Plaza.

The Arcing Path is accented by a line of Overcup Oak trees which provide shade and also emphasize the curve of the path, drawing your eye up to the plaza and future pavilion.

Planting

The planting design for Phase 1 of Constitution Gardens aims to test and establish new planting palettes and systems within the landscape framework of the National Mall. The scale of the plantings as well as the species selection will provide significant visual impact through the seasons, giving more visibility to the corner of 17th Street and Constitution Avenue and foreshadow the enhanced aesthetics and ecology to come in Phase 2. The Phase 1 planting will be comprised of mass plantings of native flowering understory trees, beneath the existing canopy trees on the site. A planted native meadow will replace the turf areas that are not within highly pedestrian areas. A number of native grass and Carex types will be used as the base meadow fabric and will provide seasonal interest. These drought tolerant species will be assessed for their performance within the National Mall setting. Accent drifts of flowering perennials and ferns will punctuate the meadow. Different palettes will be used in the sun and shade. These accents, and the meadow in general are intended to migrate and change in their form as each species finds its niche in the hill. Flowering dogwoods and Redbuds will surround the arcing walk with the Redbuds along the edge of Constitution Avenue and the Dogwoods south of the path. A great Willow oak will be the center piece of the plaza, and a formal line of Overcup oaks will draw visitors up the arcing path offering shade.

Lighting

The light levels within the Phase 1 project area are minimal. The Arrival Plaza is lit with only two Washington Globe fixtures, which are just south of the Plaza area. The Iconic Tree will be uplit with 4 small uplights, however these will only provide minimal spillover into the plaza itself. The Lockkeeper's House will have a dimmable wash of light up the sides of the house. Along the Arcing Path there is a Washington Globe light fixture between every other tree. This will supply a dim glow to the path in the evening hours.

Benches

The Arcing Path has 10 benches evenly spaced along it. Since the current NPS Standard Bench does not meet the current ABAAS Standards, we have worked with the National Park Service to modify their current bench design minimally, in-order to meet the standards. Through this process, we have elongated the bench from 4'4" to 7'-0" which allows for a center arm rest. The existing cast iron frame has been scaled up by 2" to meet the 17" min to 19" max seat height, and a continuous wood slat back that eliminates the gap between the boards that did not meet the standards. The arm has been designed to be sympathetic in form to the existing frame and the arch on the back. The bottom of the frame has been slightly modified to relate to the modified bench length as well.

Lockkeeper House Historic Pavement Markings

In order to demarcate where the Lockkeeper's House has been, we are locating a band of rectangular stones that outlines the footprint of the Lockkeeper's House in its current location as well as its original location. These stones will match the other stone in the project, but will be 9.5" long by 4.75" wide.